Museum Grants for African American History and Culture

FY2012 AAHC Tier 2 Reviewer Handbook

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Welcome to the Tier 2 AAHC Program Review Process

Thank you for offering to serve as a Museum Grants for African American History and Culture (AAHC) Tier 2 reviewer. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your professional expertise in museum operations, programs, and activities. We have prepared this handbook specifically for Tier 2 reviewers to ensure the fair and candid review of all eligible applications and to provide you with the procedural and technical information you need. Please use it in tandem with the FY2012 Museum Grants for African American History and Culture Guidelines available at:

http://www.imls.gov/applicants/african_american_history_and_culture_guidelines.aspx

Even if you have reviewed for other IMLS programs, including AAHC, in the past, you should read through this booklet.

Be sure to read the FAQs on* Writing Comments and Scoring *(Appendix II) and* The IMLS Online Reviewer System *(Appendix III).

AAHC Program Overview

The purpose of the Museum Grants for African American History and Culture (AAHC) program is to build professional capacity in the African American museum community. The program is intended to provide opportunities for the staff of African American museums to gain knowledge and abilities in the areas of management, operations, programming, collections care and other museum skills identified as high priorities by the applicants. It provides an opportunity for African American museums to design projects that will enhance institutional capacity and sustainability by utilizing professional training, technical assistance, internships, outside expertise and other tools.

For FY2012, the program will focus on three goals: 1) developing or strengthening knowledge, skills and other expertise of current staff at African American museums; 2) attracting and retaining professionals with the skills needed to strengthen African American museums; and/or 3) attracting new staff to African American museum practice and providing them with the expertise needed to sustain them in the museum field. Funds will support a wide range of activities that support these goals.

Your Role

For the FY2012 AAHC program, we received 41 applications on January 18, 2011. IMLS staff checked all applications for eligibility and completeness, and Tier 1 reviewers have evaluated all eligible applications. Each application received three Tier 1 reviews with comments and scores for each of the four narrative sections proscribed in the AAHC Grant Guidelines: Statement of Need, Impact, Project Design, and Project Resources.

Of the 41 applications, Tier 2 reviewers as a group are reviewing 22. You are one of 5 museum professionals with substantial professional experience who will review subsets of applications and then meet in Washington, DC, to discuss findings and to make final funding recommendations. The panel will meet on Thursday, June 21st to consider applications submitted to the AAHC program.   Approximately two weeks before your panel meeting, we will send you details about the meeting schedule and logistics. Your particular panel will review 22 applications in one day; you have been assigned to review 13 or 14 applications from that group.

For some of the applications you review, we have designated you as the "presenter." This means you will take the lead during the panel deliberations by giving a brief verbal synopsis of the organization and the proposed project, your preliminary score, and your concise reasons for making these recommendations. (For more detail on how panel deliberations are conducted, please see page 14 of this handbook.)

We do not ask you to do detailed technical reviews as a Tier 2 reviewer. Rather, you can rely on Tier 1 reviews for an analysis of the technical strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. You will evaluate applications from a broad perspective, identifying projects that best meet IMLS AAHC program goals and are poised for success. You will also provide insight into issues pertinent to this year's competition as well as provide recommendations on improving the grant program and its process.

We have a limited amount of time for each panel meeting, and we find that the panel discussions are most fruitful when panelists are well-prepared before they arrive. We therefore suggest that you follow the step-by-step procedures outlined in the next few pages for evaluating the applications assigned to you.

AAHC Application Review Instructions

This section of the handbook contains detailed information on how to review a Museum Grants for African American History and program application. We have arranged the information in ten steps. If you encounter any problems while undertaking your Tier 2 reviews, please contact one of us immediately. Between the two of us, we are available during normal work days, Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 6:00 pm Eastern Time. We will be happy to answer your questions and help troubleshoot any technology problems you might encounter.

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STEP 1. Verify Your Access to Applications Online

Information relating solely to software usage has been removed from this sample handbook.

STEP 2. Consider Potential Conflicts of Interest

Scan your group of applications to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. Please see the Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement included as **Appendix I** of this handbook. A conflict of interest may arise if you have a financial interest in whether or not the proposal is funded or, if for some reason, you feel that you cannot review it objectively. Contact Mark Isaksen at 202/653-4667 or misaksen@imls.gov immediately if you suspect you may have a conflict.

STEP 3. Remember Confidentiality

The information contained in grant applications is confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions' project activities, or any other information contained in the applications. Contact us if you have any questions concerning an application, and do not contact an applicant directly.

STEP 4. Gather Resources

Familiarize yourself with the Museum Grants for African American History and Culture Grants – FY2012 Guidelines, which are available at

http://www.imls.gov/applicants/african_american_history_and_culture_guidelines.aspx

Feel free to use the FY2012 Tier 2 Review Criteria Quick Reference sheet on page 16 of this handbook. The sheet summarizes the types of information you should look for in each application and provides guideposts for your review. Consider printing this page and keeping it nearby as you read applications.

STEP 5. Read Your Applications and Tier 1 Reviews

Read your applications and the Tier 1 reviews to develop a feel for the range of applicant responses and review comments.

Both the Tier 1 reviews and the applications are identified by the same log numbers (e.g. MH-04-12-0088). You will find three Tier 1 reviewer reports associated with each of your assigned applications.

Tier 1 reviewers have provided comments scores for EACH of the four sections of the narrative using a scale of 1-5 and the following definitions:

Tier 1 Score Definitions

5 – Excellent: The applicant's response is outstanding and provides exceptional support for the proposed project.

4 – Very Good: The applicant's response provides solid support for the proposed project.

3 – Good: The applicant's response is adequate but could be strengthened in its support for the proposed project.

2 – Some Merit: The applicant's response is flawed and does not adequately support the proposed project.

1 – Inadequate/Insufficient: The applicant's response is inadequate or provides insufficient information to allow for a confident evaluation.

STEP 6. Evaluate Your Applications

Now read your applications again and take notes as you read, focusing on each of the three Tier 2 review criteria. You are looking for projects that are strongest in these three areas:

- **Goals of the Museum Grants for African American History and Culture program**
- **Potential for a successful project**
- **Impact**

Remember that you are evaluating each application individually and not simply comparing them against one another.

HINT: We strongly recommend that you draft your comments using Microsoft Word®, and then copy and paste them into the IMLS Online Reviewer System. The Online Review System can crash from time to time, but if you have your work in a word processing program, you will have a convenient backup. Please be aware that there is a 2000-character limit in each of your comment boxes. You may wish to keep that in mind as you write.

The following are characteristics of good reviewing practices, so DO:

- Use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.
- Judge the application on its own merits, not on extraneous information you may have about an organization or the people involved in the project.
- Call IMLS if you question the accuracy of any information in the application or the integrity of the applicant.
- Consider a project's strengths *and* weaknesses. Acknowledge and compliment strengths, and offer practical suggestions for improving weaknesses.
- Be thoughtful in your analysis of the project.
- Make your comments concise, understandable, and specific to the individual applicant.
- Be sure your comments correlate with the number scores you provide.

Remember, both successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to improve their operations and their future submissions.

To avoid making poor comments, DO NOT:

- Make derogatory remarks or level harsh criticism.
- Penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money. (Any eligible institution may receive funds, regardless of need.)
- Question an applicant's honesty or integrity in your review.
- Merely summarize or paraphrase the applicant's own words in your comments.
- Make vague or overly general statements.
- Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information.

7. Assign Scores

As a Tier 2 reviewer, you will provide only ONE overall score for each application**.** Use a scale of 1-5, with 1 = lowest and 5 = highest, according to the following definitions:

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Tier 2 Score Definitions

5 – **Excellent:** The proposal is outstanding, and the project completely fulfills the goals of the AAHC program.

4 – **Very Good:** The proposal is solid, and the project is well-developed and highly recommended for funding.

3 – **Good:** The proposal is adequate, but probably falls short in a number of ways and could be strengthened. The project would likely be successful and is worthy of funding but it is not a high priority.

2 – **Some Merit:** Although the proposal has worth, it is flawed in one or more ways and requires major reworking. The project is not likely to be successful and should not be recommended for funding. It might be a project that is worthy of a resubmission with improvements.

1 – **Do Not Fund:** The proposal would not be successful and is not recommended for funding or resubmission in this form.

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Be sure to use only whole numbers—not fractions, decimals, zeroes, and not more than one number. Also, use the full range of scores to help determine which applications best meet the evaluation criteria.

Please note that scores of **3** (Good), **4** (Very Good), and **5** (Excellent) all correspond to "fundable." What varies between and among proposals might be the degree of alignment with the **purpose** of the AAHC grant program, some aspect of its potential for **success**, or the level of institutional and community **impact**. These are the areas we ask you to consider in crafting your evaluations, and they are the criteria we will ask you to emphasize during the panel meeting.

The following matters are **NOT** criteria we want you to take into consideration: indirect cost rates, the financial need of an institution, the national importance of a collection, and any information outside the application that relates to the museum, its staff, people served, or its history.

STEP 8. Review Your Work

Review your draft comments and preliminary scores. When you are finished, proofread your reviews. A review with even one missing score or comment cannot be accepted by the IMLS Online Reviewer System. Adjust your scores, if necessary, to more accurately reflect your written evaluation. Scores should support comments, and comments should justify scores.

Be sure that for each application, you have provided:

- written comments for each of the three evaluation sections; and
- a single score from 1-5 for the entire application.

We welcome your Additional Comments, should you wish to provide them. This section is optional and is not associated with a numerical score.

STEP 9. Submit Your Reviews

Information relating solely to software usage has been removed from this sample handbook.

STEP 10. Next Steps

Review your assigned applications and review comments again to prepare for the panel meeting in Washington, DC.

Your Role during Panel Deliberations

At the Meeting

In preparation for the panel meeting, be sure you will be ready to act as "presenter" for the 4 -5 specific applications for which you have been assigned this role (as identified in the "IMLS Packing List" sent to you attached via e-mail at the beginning of the review period), and to discuss and comment on all 13-14 applications you have read and reviewed.

We will preload electronic copies of all applications slated for discussion onto a PC laptop for your use at the meeting. You will also be able to use the laptop to record any changes to your final scores and/or comments. You are welcome, of course, to bring your own copies with notes, either paper or electronic. If you want to bring your own electronic files, we recommend using a flash drive or a CD for easy transfer to an IMLS laptop. Reviewers have told us that using one laptop at a time is preferable to two.

At the panel meeting, you will share your thoughts and recommendations with the full panel. IMLS staff will identify the application to be discussed, and the panelist assigned to "present" the application will give a brief verbal synopsis of the organization and the proposed project, his or her preliminary score (using the 1-5 scale), and concise reasons to support these recommendations. Each summation should be about three minutes in length. Then, the two other assigned readers will share their comments and scores for the proposal. Discussion will then be opened to the entire panel. Following discussion, each reader will be given an opportunity to assign a final score and make any additional comments for the applicant if necessary.

Issues Discussion

During the panel meeting, we will set aside time for an issues discussion, when you will be able to provide us with feedback on the AAHC grant program, the application materials, and the review and panel process. Time permitting; we will also have a wide-ranging discussion of what challenges, trends, and opportunities you see today in today's museum community.

After the Meeting

After the panel review process is complete, IMLS staff will review your final recommendations with the IMLS Director, who will determine, based on the funds available, which applications to fund.

Our Thanks!

We hope it is clear that your participation as a Tier 2 reviewer is a pivotal component of the IMLS peer review process. We thank you for your gifts of time and expertise and this very important contribution to the museum community. We wish you the best of luck in working through your reviews, as well as safe travels. We look forward to welcoming you to Washington in June.

Museum Grants for African American History
FY2012 Tier 2 Review Criteria Quick Reference

Your role as a panel reviewer is to evaluate how the applications meet the broad, overall goals of the AAHC grant program. Although you will provide comments for each of three criteria listed below, you will provide only one single score for each application. Consider the entire proposal as you evaluate each application's strengths and weaknesses in the following areas:

1. **Goals of the Museum Grants for African American History and Culture program**
   - Developing or strengthening knowledge, skills and other expertise of current staff at African American museums
   - Attracting and retaining professionals with the skills needed to strengthen African American museums
   - Attracting new staff to African American museum practice and providing them with the expertise needed to sustain them in the museum field

2. **Potential for successful project**
   - Evidence that the project proposes efficient, effective, and reasonable approaches to accomplish clear goals and objectives
   - Evidence that the methodology and design are appropriate to the scope of the project
   - Evidence that the applicant will effectively complete the project activities in the time allocated
   - Evidence of sound financial management, coupled with an appropriate and cost-efficient budget
   - Evidence that the project personnel demonstrate appropriate experience and expertise.

3. **Impact**
   - Evidence that the applicant is familiar with the community it serves and has performed a formal or informal assessment of the museum and/or community needs
   - Evidence that the project is designed to improve staff expertise in a manner that will create specific changes and benefits for the applicant and/or the community served
   - Evidence that the applicant has plans to sustain those changes and benefits beyond the grant period
   - Evidence that specific outcomes have been identified and a methodology has been described to measure the achievement of the project's goals and objectives

Once you have completed comments on Criteria 1 through 3, you may use the Additional Comments box in the online reviewer system to share your overall impression of the application and any general comments that do not fall into one of the above categories. Please provide ONE overall score for the entire application using the scale of 1 through 5.

Rating Scale: 5 Excellent   4 Very good   3 Good/adequate   2 Some merit   1 Do not fund

***Note: Appendices have been removed
from this sample handbook.***